CLAIM SET AS AMENDED

1. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for estimating a manufacturing cost for a product comprising:

~~an~~ a first input device for receiving input data concerning physical characteristics of ~~a~~ the product to be manufactured;

a cost calculation processor for calculating ~~a~~ the manufacturing cost based on information inputted from said first input device, and cost factor ~~data,~~ data which is independently supplied from an external source using a second input device; and

a display device for displaying ~~a~~ the calculated manufacturing cost from said cost calculation processor,

wherein said cost calculation processor calculates a plurality of alternative manufacturing costs, with each of the alternative manufacturing ~~cost~~ costs being associated with a respective one of a plurality of alternative process series for manufacturing the product, ~~when a~~ the plurality of process series ~~are~~ being entered via said first input device; and

wherein said display device displays the plurality of calculated manufacturing costs for the plurality of process series.

2. (Original) The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said cost calculation processor is arranged to calculate manufacturing costs for individual process steps of the plurality of

process series; and wherein said display device displays the calculated manufacturing costs for the individual process steps.

3. (Original) The apparatus according to claim 2, wherein said physical characteristics include at least one of a shape, a thickness, and a material composition of the product to be manufactured.

4. (Original) The apparatus according to claim 3, wherein said external source comprises:

a variable cost memory; and

a fixed cost memory.

5. (Original) The apparatus according to claim 4, wherein said variable cost memory and said fixed cost memory are connected to said cost calculation processor via an in-house net connection.

6. (Original) The apparatus according to claim 4, wherein said variable cost memory and said fixed cost memory are connected to said cost calculation processor via an internet connection.

7. (Original) The apparatus according to claim 4, wherein said input device is located in an in-house development department.

8. (Original) The apparatus according to claim 7, wherein said external source receives data from in-house production facilities and outsourced component makers.

9. (Original) The apparatus according to claim 8, wherein said in-house production facilities are connected to said external source via an in-house net connection, and wherein said outsourced component makers are connected to said external source via an internet connection.

10. (Cancelled)

11. (Original) The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said external source comprises:

a variable cost memory; and

a fixed cost memory.

12. (Original) The apparatus according to claim 11, wherein said variable cost memory and said fixed cost memory are connected to said cost calculation processor via an in-house net connection.

13. (Original) The apparatus according to claim 11, wherein said variable cost memory and said fixed cost memory are connected to said cost calculation processor via an internet connection.

14. (Original) The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said input device is located in an in-house development department.

15. (Original) The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said external source receives data from in-house production facilities and outsourced component makers.

16. (Original) The apparatus according to claim 15, wherein said in-house production facilities are connected to said external source via an in-house net connection, and wherein said outsourced component makers are connected to said external source via an internet connection.

17. (Withdrawn) A method of estimating a manufacturing cost for a product, said method comprising the steps of:

entering physical characteristics data concerning the product to be made;

storing the characteristics data in a first memory;

accessing a second memory storing cost factors provided by a plurality of producers;

calculating estimated costs for manufacturing the product relative to the plurality of the producers; and

displaying the estimated costs for the plurality of producers.

18. (Withdrawn) The method according to claim 17, further comprising the step of:

updating the cost factors stored in the second memory by the plurality of producers.

19. (Withdrawn) The method according to claim 17, wherein said calculating step further includes figuring manufacturing costs for individual process steps of each of the plurality of producers; and wherein said displaying step further includes revealing the calculated manufacturing costs for the individual process steps.

20. (Withdrawn) The method according to claim 17, wherein said accessing step takes place via an internet connection.

21. (New) An apparatus for estimating a manufacturing cost for a product comprising:

a first input device and an associated first display device for receiving and viewing input data concerning physical characteristics of the product to be manufactured;

a cost calculation processor for calculating the manufacturing cost based on information inputted from said first input device, and cost factor data independently supplied from an external source using a second input device;

said first display device for displaying the calculated manufacturing costs from said cost calculation processor,

wherein, upon entering a plurality of alternative process series for manufacturing the product via said first input device, said cost calculation processor calculates a plurality of alternative manufacturing costs, with each of the alternative manufacturing costs being associated with a respective one of the plurality of alternative process series for manufacturing the product, and displays said plurality of calculated manufacturing costs on said first display device,

wherein the calculated manufacturing costs displayed on said first display device change based on the cost factor data independently supplied from the external source using the second input device.